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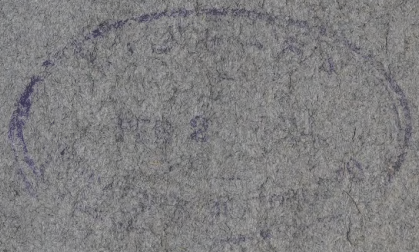
City Planning Organization

by G. Frank Best

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BY
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**An Address given before the Fifth Annual Meeting
of the Commission of Conservation**

Ottawa: Commission of Conservation: 1914

A Plea for City Planning Organization

Paper read by G. Frank Beer, President of the Toronto Housing Company, before the Commission of Conservation at its Annual Meeting, Ottawa, January 20th, 1914

THE tendency of population to centralize is resulting in an unprecedented growth of towns and cities in all countries. In Canada, this unusual growth is augmented by a large inflow of foreign immigrants. Under existing conditions, the result is a matter of small satisfaction, for, too often, as the Rt. Hon. Viscount Bryce has said, "a big city is a big evil." This fact, however, in no way serves to check the growth. On the contrary, villages quickly develop into towns, towns, in a decade, become cities, and the problems of large cities increase in geometrical ratio to their size.

With a suddenness that is almost startling, we find our cities both in the East and in the West confronted with problems which they have neither the experience nor the machinery to cope with. Added to this is the misfortune that the administration of cities in Canada, is largely in the hands of those who have no special training or qualification to deal with problems that are taxing the mature experience and best talent of older cities.

Take, for instance, the matter of transportation. The main street which easily served for the village traffic becomes seriously congested. Transportation was a simple problem when the houses of villagers with their gay gardens were grouped around the corner store. But in the rapidly growing city the grouping together of factories and huge office buildings, places an insupportable burden upon transportation facilities. The checker-board plan of city subdivision,

unbroken by diagonal thoroughfares and with too little provision for rapid transport, entails an excessive waste of time upon citizens going to and from their work. I know of cases where masons and carpenters are required to travel for over an hour after leaving their homes in order to reach their work. Such conditions will continue and will grow worse until proper city planning methods are put into practice. To-day, civic management requires men possessing foresight, who are specially trained in solving difficult questions of engineering, sanitation and transportation as they are affected by the growth of the city into the immediately adjoining territory.

Here and there in Canada, students of municipal problems have for some time endeavoured to secure legislation and machinery to co-ordinate the development of urban and rural communities. But our national absorption in supplying the material things called for by the rapid growth of population, has made it difficult, if not impossible, to secure public attention for matters of civic betterment. Here and there something has been accomplished, but nowhere has it been adequate nor has it in any degree furnished a standard for other communities to follow. Nor is this, in a measure, to be wondered at. A knowledge of civic government and city planning is to be acquired only by patient and thorough study. I shall perhaps not be misunderstood if I add that few of our city fathers have this knowledge. Much would be accomplished for the public welfare in Canada if wise guidance were provided through an organization similar to the English Local Government Board. In the meantime, practically no Canadian municipality is taking sufficient thought for the future in planning for water supply, transportation and other public services.

There was a time when city planning was looked upon as a fad, something ornamental rather than useful. Many good movements, even that for the conservation of natural

resources, have shared the same criticism. That time, however, happily is past. To-day, the three leading countries of the world, Great Britain, Germany and the United States, are wide awake to the value and necessity of providing the machinery required to carry out this work. In England, the Town Planning and Housing Act, an evolution of the Public Health Act, has proved a most effective piece of legislation. The cities of England are literally being made over again. This Act is now recognized to be of national importance owing to the improvement in living conditions effected by its operation. A large increase in the powers of the Local Government Board, which administers the Act, is a direct result of this recognition.

In Germany, city planning has reached its highest development. Difficulties, which, to us seem insurmountable, have there been solved upon lines which time has shown to be sound and sufficient. The orderly and astonishing growth of German cities affords self-evident proof of this. Indeed, a knowledge of city planning and its effect upon the welfare of the people of Canada might well begin with a thorough study of German methods and legislation.

The latest great nation to awaken to the significance of this new movement is the United States. The Massachusetts Legislature, at its last session, provided for the establishment of local Planning Boards in all cities and large towns. The duty of these Boards is to make a careful study of the resources, possibilities and needs of the city or town, particularly with respect to conditions which may be injurious to the public health. A further duty of the Board is to make plans for the development of the municipalities with special reference to the housing of their citizens. Ex-Governor Foss, when calling representatives of all the cities and towns in the State to a conference concerning the operation of the Act, stated, that the object of the gathering was to focus attention upon, and to emphasize the importance of the

city planning movement, which, he stated, was "fundamental in its relation to all other projects for civic betterment."

In New York city, an important and largely attended exhibition to illustrate city planning methods, projects and results has recently been held.

What then is the object and scope of city planning and how can legislation and machinery, not at present existing in Canada, be best secured to attain the desired end?

The subject may be roughly divided into three sections,—Sanitation, Transportation and, what, for want of a better name, I shall call Co-ordination. These may be subdivided as follows:

Sanitation:

- (a) An adequate supply of pure water.
- (b) Sanitary and economical disposal of sewage and garbage.
- (c) The prevention of slums and provision for the satisfactory housing of wage earners.

Transportation:

- (a) The arrangement of transportation systems including radials, and the location of passenger stations and freight sheds.
- (b) The development of harbour facilities, including the erection of necessary wharves, bridges and docks.
- (c) The laying out of thoroughfares to accommodate the necessarily varied traffic.

Co-ordination:

- (a) The laying out of desirable manufacturing districts and provision for adequate shipping facilities.
- (b) The planning of residential districts, especially for working men, so that they may be housed within reasonable distance of their work.

(c) The location of municipal produce markets in proper relation to residential districts and shipping facilities.

(d) The systematic selection of recreational facilities such as parks, play-grounds and swimming baths.

(e) The location of educational institutes such as schools, colleges and public libraries.

(f) The proper distribution of public service buildings, such as fire halls, police stations, post-offices and hospitals.

(g) The acquiring of natural beauty spots and their development as public squares and breathing spaces.

(h) The acquiring of land needed for the purposes enumerated under the five last paragraphs, before an enhanced value places unnecessary burdens upon the public exchequer.

(i) Provision and planning for car-lines, sewage-, gas- and water-mains, telephone and electric light wires to secure the greatest possible economy in their installation, and to avoid the usual waste of repeated tearing up of pavements and consequent dislocation of traffic.

(j) The laying out of the surrounding territory so that the natural and inevitable growth of the city may be rationally and economically guided.

The list is a long one but nothing included is superfluous. To summarize, *efficiency*, *economy* and *vision* in city planning are what are aimed at.

Some years ago the æsthetic aspect of this subject was considered the one of paramount interest. It is, however, the economic value of such planning that has brought the matter prominently before the public and won for it many friends and exponents. The millions of dollars spent upon the widening of main thoroughfares, after the erection of expensive buildings, has increased the cost of such improvements. The rounding of corners and widening of important intersections at large expense have aroused the ratepayers to seek the cause of such avoidable expenditures, which are

evidently due to lack of foresight. The subject is many-sided and naturally the emphasis has been placed by those discussing it, upon the features that most appealed to them. The medical health officer, the business man, the engineer, the architect, the artist, each finds in it something of special interest. The reason is not far to seek, for at its base city planning implies *conservation of life, and the elimination of waste*. The *thinking before doing*, which is involved, makes for the beauty which is inherent in *things fitly planned*, in so far as they affect the physical development of our cities.

Neglect and lack of foresight in planning cities lead to needless expense, and, when ratepayers find that heavy expenditure is necessary to remedy the results of early neglect, the tendency is to curtail the expenditure. The effect is inevitable. A few years later, they are faced with the same problems in aggravated forms, the remedies are still more expensive and the money spent upon half-remedies is found to have been largely wasted. The prevention of such waste is one of the objects of modern city planning.

As cities grow they naturally encroach upon the territory surrounding them. The result is a divergence of interests which works to the disadvantage of both city and country. Notice, for instance, the ill-kept roads immediately adjoining cities where a working agreement has not been arrived at between the city and suburban districts. Not infrequently, too, there is a clashing of interests between nearby towns and cities in reference to water supply and sewage disposal. Machinery to adjust all such differences and co-ordinate the natural development of town and country is the main object of what, for want of a better name we call city planning. The subject really has a much wider application than is implied in its name. The interests of town and country are alike involved.

We greatly need some organized body to explain to the people what can be done in Canada and what is now being

done in other countries along the lines indicated. In addition to this, we need in every province and city wise enabling legislation and a qualified board to administer the same.

In any effort to frame housing and city planning legislation and to provide machinery to meet Canadian needs, European experience will teach us much, but, in the main, our problems are Canadian problems deeply affected by our local conditions, ideals and existing organization. We cannot, without careful consideration, transplant a German or even an English solution to Canadian soil. The same thorough study which evolved a Town Planning and Housing Act for Great Britain must precede workable and satisfactory legislation for Canada. Where so much is involved, it is folly to expect a ready-made solution on the shelves of any public library.

Housing legislation must also be framed as an inseparable part of such work. We are all so absorbed, necessarily, no doubt, in our own businesses, that we have failed to realize the development of housing conditions which shame our civilization. Is it necessary in Canada for thousands of families to occupy but one room each and thousands of other families to occupy but two rooms each? Is it really necessary in Canada that thousands of houses built for one family and with one set of sanitary conveniences only should house two, three, four and even six families? Do we expect permanent progress and decent family life to continue under these conditions? Only those faced with it, know of the distressing and degrading effects of over-crowding. We all know that the morals of a community are moulded largely by home environment. The very existence of the family life upon which we pride ourselves is dependent upon decent housing. Living conditions have a psychological as well as a material side. Ideals and refinement surely die unless a reasonably favourable environment is provided for their exercise and development. Our boast should be, not how

many fine houses there are in our cities, but how few poor, unsanitary and unworthy ones. Indeed, the problem is not confined to our cities, one may find living conditions in our country districts comparable with city slums. Slums produce inefficiency—inefficiency begets poverty and poverty of this character means disease and degradation. This is not a sensational statement; it is cold fact. Simply as a matter of common sense, we should wipe out our slums and prevent their growth.

In a country as generally prosperous as Canada, the ownership of his own home should not be an unreality for a working man of steady habits. As Sir Oliver Lodge has recently said: "Our conceptions of the possible need training and widening." No measure will so tend to the realization of this vision as to have our cities intelligently planned with residential areas, factory districts and transportation facilities linked up in some reasonably co-ordinated plan. One-half of the housing problem is a problem of transportation.

A year ago I could not have spoken so strongly but circumstances have since brought to my notice the almost incredible housing conditions that exist throughout Canada. A remedy is possible or our social organization is merely a veneer. I do not believe that it is, but it is possible that we are in danger of being overwhelmed by an accumulation of material interests and are denying to higher things their proper place.

CITY PLANNING IN TORONTO

A few years ago, a movement was inaugurated in Toronto, having for its object, among other things, the establishment of play-grounds, so that city boys and girls might have a desirable substitute for the immeasurably superior advantages enjoyed by those fortunate enough to have been born in the country. Through the effort of a few

private citizens, chief of whom was Sir Edmund Osler, the necessity of play-grounds, equipped and supervised, was so fully established, that at present the cause needs no advocacy. Its benefits are acknowledged everywhere.

The purchase of land for play-grounds in a very congested district drew attention to the undesirable houses that had been built in the lanes of the city. It was for the children of just such neighbourhoods that play-grounds were desired. So a number of these houses were bought, torn down, and the lots turned into a fully equipped and supervised play-ground, now named the Osler Play-ground in honour of its generous donor. The living conditions thus disclosed, after several years of study and education, resulted in a housing movement, which is now endeavouring to do for housing reform what has been so well done for play-grounds. One outcome of this movement is the formation of the Toronto Housing Company, which is now spending its first million dollars upon the erection of decent cheap houses for wage-earners.

The chief result of the movement was, however, that it led the company to seek the causes of play-ground and housing deficiencies, congestion of population and transportation difficulties. Careful study has shown that the lack of city planning lay at the root of these, and many other civic evils. Ex-Governor Foss of Massachusetts has well said: "*This is fundamental in its relation to all other projects for civic betterment.*"

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

No single means will be found sufficient to check existing evils and prevent their further growth. The Commission of Conservation can, however, in a large and convincing way, point out to the people of Canada, what has proved of great social and economic value elsewhere and thus prepare public opinion for the adoption of similar methods.

It is highly desirable that a Housing and City Planning Conference be held each year under the auspices of the Commission of Conservation. Possibly this might take the form of a special annual meeting of the Committee on Public Health. Such a meeting would receive large publicity and the educative effect would be widespread and of great value. Local organizations would doubtless be formed throughout Canada as a result of such conferences, and the local public interest aroused would go far toward making effective action possible. A wide circulation of the Annual Report of the meeting would further assist in the same direction.

You will remember the satisfaction felt by all thoughtful Canadians when the Commission of Conservation was established. The inaugural address of the Chairman was an inspiration alike to right-thinking and right-acting and has widely affected Canadian thought and action ever since. To include city planning among the activities of the Commission is only to deepen the service it is rendering to Canada. This, too, is conservation,—the *conservation of life and desirable living conditions*. *The two are inseparable*.

We are now reaping the reward of the campaign of education already begun by your Committee on Public Health and its efficient officers. From Vancouver to Halifax this question is receiving attention as never before. In every civic centre there are citizens with the good-will, but who require advice and guidance to make their good-will effective. As an evidence of the wide-spread interest felt at present in housing you may be surprised to learn that no less than *fourteen* representatives from Canadian cities attended a recent meeting of the American Housing Association, held in Cincinnati.

It should not be necessary for Canadians to go abroad for information, leadership and advice on city planning. The Commission of Conservation should satisfy this want. It is men and legislation that are required, not money nor

material means. Much work is required if legislation is to be framed to meet the need in Canada. As I said before, our problems are our own. They are not even American problems, a fact clearly established at the recent Housing Conference in Cincinnati. City Planning and Housing Acts suitable for Canadian cities in each of the provinces can be framed only after the most careful and painstaking study. It may be found that something in the nature of a Central Bureau is desirable, a Bureau to which all our cities and provinces could apply for information, and through which the experience of each could be made available for the benefit of all. Or, owing to the extent of the undertaking, it may be found desirable to form a special committee of the Conservation Commission in order to deal effectively with the whole matter. Whatever action is required, with the Commission behind the work, it can and will be well and thoroughly done. No other body in Canada is so well qualified to guide the study, find the solution, frame the legislation and take such steps as may be found necessary to secure its adoption.

In proportion as population centralizes, *the power of the individual to shape his environment lessens and the responsibility of the State increases*. To accept this responsibility before avoidable evils have taken firm root, is to adopt the wisest course.

I have urged chiefly the economic value of city planning; it is a very great factor, but health, morals, beauty, and all that make life really worth the living, lie at its very heart. This is work not for the few, but for all. Through it, a standard of living may be established which will demonstrate our moral right to the ownership of Canada.

